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Question1: absolutely new farmers and ranchers should be strongly encouraged to begin farming and if that means by offering land discounts or even better, land trusts, we should do it. Important caveat though - this offer must not be for industrial or agri-business farms, but be offered solely for the independent farmer.

Question2: We need to consider the types of farming that will best help our nation. Imports and exports are well and good, but serving local communities with top quality nutritional products (including vegetable, meat, dairy and grain) is something no import can accomplish. Educating out already growing at home market for local and organically produced goods will stimulate the kind of "in house" and local economic gains so many of our communities can use.

In terms of global competitiveness, I think artisan products with distinctly regional flavors can compete with European wines and cheeses, Argentine and New Zealand beef.

I think the "big boys" that produce heavily traded and exported commodity crops should be left to their own devices. That capitalism! If we are going to do it around the world, make it fair. Stimulate production at home by keeping money circulating locally and building health in the citizens through quality food.

Question3: It seems obvious that farming "corporate welfare" should be drastically reduced or eliminated completely. I do not want Cargill or other mega corps. benefitting from these insurances or subsidies in any way.

It is a little trickier with mid sized farmers. Of course they should be insured WHILE they are transitioning to a more beneficial way of farming - i.e. multi-crop versus mono-crop - which will give them more versatility in the case of disaster.

Market prices are funny because it seems anyway you turn it Americans will be spending more for food. To coordinate slightly higher prices with increased quality could help offset health care and medication costs. It certainly has in my life and in the lives of others I know.

Question4: Working farms that integrate a varied biosystem are our best models. Pastureland that rotates, rotation of fruit and vegetable crops and use of woods and forest as environmental buffers would be our best bet for integrating food delivery and environmental goals. Also suggested is the model several plains beef ranchers are using: pasture feed beef rotated to different lands prevents erosion, and most importantly, stimulates diverse grass production. Some of these ranchers see strong evidence that native prairie grasses are being regrown in abundance and that this variety helps the health, quality and taste of the beef.

The WTO is problematic as it is too narrow in its scope. of course international trade is important and can be very beneficial to the entire world. But a balance between global needs (especially as they are typically viewed as global economic needs) must be balanced by local , regional and national control over living environment. People need to retain the right to ban farming, synthetics or development as they see fit for the health of the region / nation!

Question5: Yes, and again the key is the independent farmer who has integrated their farm into the larger landscape of the community. For instance, pig or salmon farms that run off tremendous amounts of feces need to be excluded because they are polluting their locality. Farmers who use integrated pest an, ranching and farming practices are a boon to the community in terms of product, beauty and environmental health. They should have access to computers, alternative technologies for energy and machinery innovations.

other innovations such as:

Vermont fresh, (where in schools buy into a local first food program)

inner city and poor rural related business upstart guidance and money (such as bread baking, restaurant deliver, hot house growing or even inner city lot farming)

and investing in farm or ranch land trusts are all ways the USDA can help.

Question6: Well I think the answers to all my other questions lead right to this. The future of the health of our farms and our nation depend and just these activities. I think the next farm bill should be bold and brave and invest in the creation of a lot more little farms that provide organics, local food, artisan food for local or export use, diversity in crops, environmental innovations and a deep respect for crop diversity by growing heirloom or other unusual strains of a crop.